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ABSTRACT

The field survey procedures employed and the response rates obtained in the First Follow-Up Survey of the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS) are described. The first step in data collection for First Follow-Up involved an extensive tracing operation to update name and address files. A newsletter was mailed out to enlist the cooperation of potential NLS respondents and to obtain updated addresses. A variety of sources were used to trace those not responding to the newsletter, with a success rate of over 90 percent. The survey questionnaire was then mailed to all identified subjects. Further study was then undertaken to obtain information that might lead to improvements in strategy for a Second Follow-Up. Comparisons were made between (1) Air Mail and Certifed Mail questionnaires, (2) telephone calls, and (3) mailgrams and prompting postcards. Mailgrams were found to be the most cost effective. The Census Bureau also interviewed a sample of the mail nonrespondents. Recommendations for the Second Follow-Up deal with the mailout process, tracing, and other materials sent to potential respondents. (BW)

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The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972

First Follow-Up

SURVEY PROCEDURES TO MAXIMIZE PARTICIPATION

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The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972
First Follow-Up

SURVEY PROCEDURES TO MAXIMIZE PARTICIPATION

I. BACKGROUND

This paper will discuss the First Follow-Up Survey of the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, with emphasis on the field survey procedures employed, the response rates obtained, and the recommendations which were made for procedures to be implemented in the Second Follow-Up.

A. Base-Year Activities

The National Longitudinal Study (NLS) grew out of the large-scale Office of Education plan for a series of Longitudinal Studies of Educational Effects to be conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). NLS itself got underway with Base-Year data collection in Spring 1972. Participants selected comprised a national 2-stage probability sample, with 1,200 high schools as the first stage and 18 randomly selected 1972 seniors from each school (21,600 students) as the second stage. The first stage school sampling frame was stratified on seven variables such as region, type of control, size, minority representation, and overall school income level. Additional schools and students were selected as back-up or substitute selections so as to preserve the integrity of the sample design in case of non-participation.

Base-Year data collection involved a 104-question student questionnaire, a 69-minute test battery measuring verbal and non-verbal abilities, a school questionnaire, a counselor questionnaire, and information from individual student school records. The principal in each school designated a survey administrator who was responsible for the completion of the school questionnaire and student record forms, as well as for administering the counselor questionnaire to two counselors per school and the student questionnaire to the selected sample member students. The student questionnaire set the general scope of the later follow-up questionnaires by providing student-perceived information relative to:

-Plans for the future (plans for the coming year, long-range educational and career goals, plans to use financial aid programs)
-Biographical information (sex, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, parental press for education)
-High school experiences (programs, grades, activities, jobs)
-Attitudes and opinions (about high school, selecting a career persons who influenced student plans, self-esteem, and ability to complete college).

Students selected for the survey were informed of the voluntary nature of survey participation and of their prerogative to skip any questions which they considered personally sensitive. In addition, the selected participants were informed of the objectives and importance of the study with respect to future educational benefits and improvement. Participants were assured that their questionnaire responses would be treated as confidential information, that they would remain anonymous, and that data collected by the survey would be published only in aggregate form.

During the Base-Year effort, 949 primary and 121 back-up schools (1,070 schools total) were able to participate. Since data collection took place late in the 1971-72 school year, lack of time to prepare for the survey was by far the most common reason given by selected schools for declining to participate. An average of 17 students per participating school took part. The resulting sample of 17,726 student participants produced varying response rates for individual data collection forms. The student questionnaire was completed by 16,409 students (93 percent), and the test battery was taken by 15,625 (88 percent). The student's school record information form was filled out for all but 33 of the 17,726 respondents - a nearly 100 percent completion rate. The school questionnaire was completed by 1,038 (97 percent) of the participating schools, the counselor questionnaire was filled out by 1,084 counselors in 1,040 schools.

B. Resurvey Activities

In the summer of 1973, and as an initial part of First Follow-Up NLS activities, NCES contacted the schools that initially were unable to participate in the base-year survey. Nearly all of these "resurvey" schools provided last-known names and addresses for random samples of 18 of their class of 1972 seniors, and they agreed to furnish school questionnaire data and school record information about individual former students who themselves would agree to participate in the National Longitudinal Study. The addition of "resurvey" schools boosted the total school sample size to 1,153 primary

schools, 147 backup and sample augmentation schools and 23,122 potential First Follow-Up respondents.

Base-Year questionnaire information was needed from the "resurvey" individuals added to the initial participants. Recognizing that the clock could not be turned back to get as complete a picture from these additional sample members, the information gathering effort from them was limited to relatively hard data rather than including attitudes, general plans, and perceptions likely to change substantially over time.

C. First Follow-Up Instruments

The First Follow-Up Form A Questionnaire was an 85-item, 24-page booklet designed for self-administration by the respondent. Section A requested general information, current activity state, demographic data, and opinions; Section B covered education and training since high school, but with special emphasis on October 1972 and October 1973; Section C dealt with parallel concerns in the area of work experience; Section D inquired about military experience if any; and Section E was again general but asking background type questions including post-secondary education application information.

Form B of the questionnaire was designed for those "resurvey" participants from whom selected base-year information was needed. Identical to Form A through 85 questions and 24 pages, Form B continued for 14 additional items of interest in Section E: high school programs, activities, and plans; family information; and personal demographic information. Form B also contained a signature block for respondents to give permission for access to school records.

The inside back cover page of both forms contained Section F, which was designed to obtain detailed tracing information such as parent and friend addresses and telephone numbers, date of birth, social security number, and driver's license number.

Most of the questions on the Base-Year and First Follow-Up Questionnaires were of the forced-choice type. Open-ended or free-response questions were limited to those involving dates, income, number of hours or weeks worked, and the like. All questions were carefully constructed and formated by specialists in instrument design, and they were extensively field tested using another national probability sample.

D. First Follow-Up Activities

The first step in data collection for First Follow-Up involved an extensive tracing operation to update name and address files. Research Triangle Institute received from the Base-Year contractor a name and address file with

19,144 records on it, from which 18,672 individuals were selected for First Follow-Up. An additional 4,450 names and addresses were provided to NCES and RTI by base-year non-participating "resurvey" schools for "resurvey" students to be added to the sample. Newsletters with accompanying return postcards were developed and mailed in July and September 1973 to the augmented file of 23,122 sample members to encourage participation and to use as a vehicle for updating names and addresses. Postcard returns were used to update records; and when newsletters were returned by the Postal Service as undeliverable, telephone tracing procedures were used to obtain current addresses where possible.

The major mailout of over 23,000 questionnaires to the latest known addresses of potential respondents was made on 23-24 October 1973. This was followed by a planned sequence of reminder postcards, additional questionnaire mailings, and reminder mailgrams to nonrespondents. Active mail return efforts continued through December 1973; and by early January 1974, the questionnaire return rate by mail was over 60 percent.

The names and available tracing information for over 8,000 sample members who failed to return their questionnaires by mail were then turned over to the Bureau of the Census for personal interview in accordance with a Bureau contract with the U. S. Office of Education. This personal interview phase of first follow-up data collection continued through March 1974, at which time the overall response rate was increased to about 93 percent.

II. PROCEDURES

A. Newsletter Mailout

The survey plan for First Follow-Up involved from the start an unusually extensive effort both to enlist the support and cooperation of potential NLS respondents and to obtain updated addresses of this highly mobile group. Two quite-similar newsletters were prepared early in July 1973 with the purposes of relaying information just coming out of Base-Year data analysis and reinforcing the goals and purposes of NLS communicated during Base-Year data collection in the high schools. The basic newsletter, intended for Base-Year respondents, is contained in the Appendix. The "resurvey" newsletter required an additional short explanation covering how and why RTI and NCES obtained the sample member's name.

A total of 18,672 newsletters was mailed to Base-Year respondents (those who had participated in the study while in high school) in July 1973. This included some of the back-up or substitute student selectees. During

September and early October 4,450 "resurvey" newsletters were mailed to those individuals who had not participated while in high school. All of these mailings included a return postcard (Appendix) requesting information about the student's current address at that time and anticipated address as of October 1973. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the returns from these mailouts.

Table 1

NEWSLETTER POSTCARD RETURNS
(23,122 Mailed)

Item	Number	Percent
Address O.K.	3,400	14.7
Address change reported by respondent	2,951	12.8
Address change reported by Postal Service	219	1.0
Returned by Postal Service as undeliverable	1,565	6.8
TOTAL	8,135	35.2

Returns from the newsletter mailing were not as complete as hoped for, in that only 28 percent of the addressees sent back postcards to confirm or change an address. Perhaps others saw no reason to confirm a correct address. The overall return rate was boosted somewhat by the Postal Service returns. Nonetheless, the results of the early communication effort undoubtedly reduced the number of "misses" in the full follow-up operation and contributed to the success of that operation.

B. Tracing Activities

Included in the Base-Year student questionnaire was a request for not only the student's name, address and social security number, but such additional data as the name and address of two people who would always know where to get in touch with the respondent, driver's license number and the state, and postsecondary educational institutions planned to attend. (A similar set of tracing information was requested in Section F of the First Follow-Up questionnaire.) RTI established a Telephone Tracing Department to handle NLS tracing activities, and trained staff were recruited, special equipment installed, and a detailed manual was written.

Tracing began early in August 1973 as the Postal Service returned undeliverable mail from the newsletter mailouts, and operations continued through January

1974 to include tracing for questionnaires which were returned as undeliverable. While a detailed description of the general tracing procedures and step-by-step instructions for telephone tracing is too voluminous for this paper, a summary of methods is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

TRACING SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1.	Name, address, and telephone number of parents, guardians or other relatives of the individual.
2.	Names, addresses, and telephone numbers (furnished by the individual and other contacts) of the two people who would always know how to get in touch with him.
3.	Name and location of the postsecondary school the same member has attended or planned to attend.
4.	Name and location of the sample member's employer, as reported in the first follow-up questionnaire.
5.	Neighbors of the sample member or his parents.
6.	Principal or other contact at the secondary school attended.
7.	State or registration and identification number of driver's license.
8.	Local government agencies.
9.	Armed forces locator services (or rosters as supplied by DOD for the first follow-up).
10.	Institutional records (i.e., prison, police, mental institutions, etc.)
11.	Local credit bureau or other similar organization.

The Tracing Department successfully traced over 90 percent of the more than 2,000 cases it worked on, as shown in Table 3. Although almost all of the tracing activities were conducted by telephone, a large portion of the 177 unsuccessful tracing cases included mail as well as telephone attempts to obtain a current address. Mail was used in those instances where students, parents, and other contacts did not have a telephone, and also in an effort to obtain current addresses for some colleges and state Motor Vehicle Departments.

As new addresses were obtained, whether from tracing activities, returned mail, or other sources, the computer file of names and addresses was updated and, when necessary, an additional mailing of a questionnaire was made. A total of 1,376 second questionnaire mailings of this type was completed from 16 November 1973 through 4 January 1974.

Table 3

TELEPHONE TRACING CASES

Cases to Tracing from Newsletter Undeliverables		1,565
Cases to Tracing from Questionnaire Undeliverables		502
		2,067
	Number	Percent
Tracing Cases Completed	1,890	91.4
Tracing Cases Unsuccessful	177	8.6
TOTAL	2,067	100.0

Fourteen of the cases that were not successfully traced were sent to a local credit bureau for processing. The credit bureau was unable to obtain a current address on any of these cases.

C. Questionnaire Mailout, Follow-Up, and Results

The follow-up strategy was designed primarily to produce a maximum response rate, consistent with resources and cost considerations, up to and including 60 percent by mail as a goal. The remaining 40 percent would be individually contacted by Census Bureau field personnel using tracing information provided by RTI and gleaned from its experience in dealing with this NLS sample. While including a Special Study (later to be described) embedded in the sequence of operations, the follow-up procedures were comprised of questionnaire mailouts, reminders by postcard, and mailgram requests -- all controlled and updated by a computerized automated survey support system.

Prior to the mailout of First Follow-Up Questionnaires 102 individuals were deleted from the list of eligibles for the survey due to duplicates names, incomplete addresses, deceased, etc. Questionnaires (Forms A and B) were mailed to the 23,020 individuals designated as in the First Follow-Up sample on 23-24 October 1973. The events following this mailout, as detailed in Table 4, resulted in 13,928 (60.5 percent) questionnaires being returned by mail by 1 February 1974, along with 107 duplicates (time lag and error were causes) and 108 written refusals. Copies of the texts of the reminder/thank you and the two prompting postcards, and the mailgrams, are contained in the Appendix. In addition to these materials, and not indicated in Table 4 but included in the Appendix, are copies of a letter from NCES which accompanied the second questionnaire mailout to nonrespondents, a letter of thanks from RTI which was sent to all

Table 4

OVERALL MAIL RETURNS AND RESPONSE RATE

Date	Main Event	Number Mailed	Elapsed Days	Question-naires Received	Cumulative Total	Response Rate
10/23-24	Questionnaire Mailout	23,020	--	--	--	--
10/30-31	Reminder/ thank you	23,020	8	2,615	2,615	11.4%
11/13-14	First prompt-ing postcard	14,053	23	5,277	7,892	34.3%
11/27-28	Second question-naire mailout*	12,163	37	1,723	9,615	41.8%
12/4-5	Second prompting postcard*	11,945	44	1,017	10,632	46.2%
12/13-14	Mailgram**	10,313	53	1,502	12,134	52.7%
1/2	--	--	72	1,423	13,577	59.0%
2/1	--	--	102	371	13,928	60.5%

* As a part of the Special Study discussed in Section V of this report, the mailings of 27 and 28 November and 4 and 5 December were split in order to ompare the effectiveness of second questionnaires and second prompting post-cards. A sub-sample of 2,183 of the 12, 163 nonrespondents as of 27 and 28 November received postcards and a sub-sample of 3,080 of the 11,945 non-respondents as of 4 and 5 December received questionnaires.

** One of the results of the Special Study, this was a final effort to increase the response rate to 60 percent.

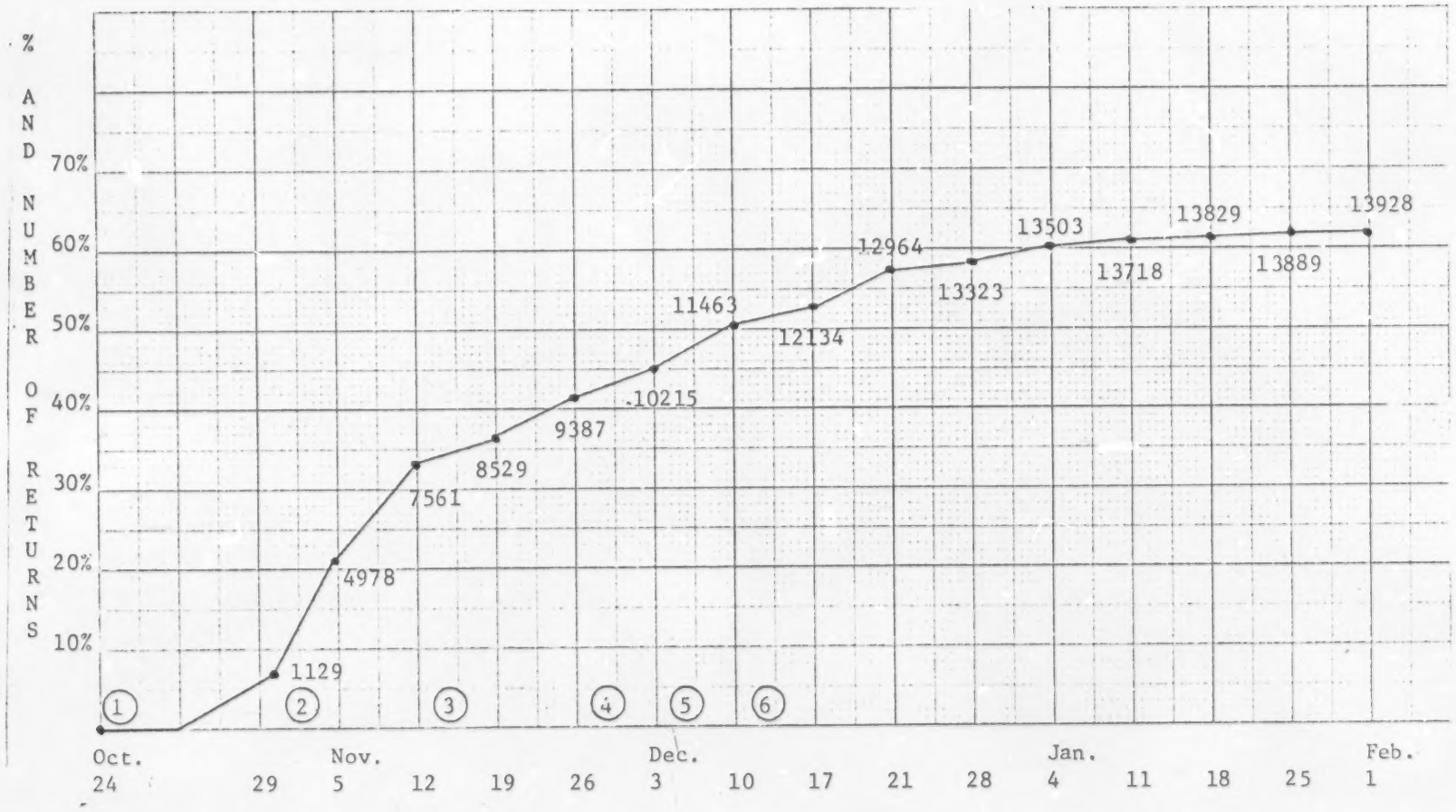
mail respondents, and a computer-generated self-mailing Identification and Change of Address Card sent to all First Follow-Up participants after survey operations were completed.

Figure 1 shows a graph of cumulative response rate over time. As might be anticipated, the bulk of the responses by mail were received at RTI in the first three weeks after the initial mailout. The response percentage for the first three weeks was about 61 percent of the total received as compared to 21 percent for the next three week period and 18 percent for the final period prior to 1 February. An additional 155 questionnaires were later received by mail, bringing the total mail returns to 14,083 (61.2 percent).

Although it is not possible to determine the precise effect each mailout had on response rate, some general conclusions may be drawn by assuming that no appreciable effect is felt until about five days after the mailout of a

Figure 1

MAIL RESPONSE RATE TIME CHART



(1) - 1st Questionnaire Mailout
(2) - Reminder/Thank You Postcard
(3) - 1st Prompting Postcard
(4) - 2nd Questionnaire Mailout
(5) - 2nd Prompting Postcard
(6) - Mailgram

particular item. The use of this theory allows the assumptions concerning response rates that are shown in Table 5 to be made.

These assumptions do not allow for any cumulative effects which might exist when a person receives more than one mail request. The overall response rate of slightly more than 60 percent appears to be relatively high considering the length (24-28 pages) and complexity of the questionnaire, the fact that no incentive was offered, and that the "resurvey" students, about 20 percent of the total, had no prior involvement in the study.

Table 5

ESTIMATED EFFECT OF VARIOUS MAILOUTS ON RESPONSE RATES

	Main Event	Response Rate
1.	First questionnaire mailout	21%
2.	Reminder/thank you postcard	16%
3.	First prompting postcard	8%
4.	Second questionnaire mailout	6%
5.	Second prompting postcard	3%
6.	Mailgram	7%
	TOTAL	61%

The response rates for the "resurvey" group lagged well behind those for the sample members involved in the Base-Year data collection efforts, as Table 6 makes clear.

Table 6

COMPARATIVE MAIL RESPONSE RATE FOR RESURVEY AND BASE-YEAR STUDENTS

After	Resurvey Response	Base Year Participant Response	Difference	Total Response
2 weeks	13.6%	28.0%	14.4%	24.8%
3 weeks	19.2%	36.9%	17.7%	33.0%
4 weeks	23.4%	42.3%	18.9%	38.1%
5 weeks	27.1%	46.5%	19.4%	42.2%
6 weeks	29.8%	50.1%	20.3%	45.6%
7 weeks	34.9%	55.3%	20.4%	50.8%
8 weeks	38.9%	59.1%	20.2%	54.6%
10 weeks	43.5%	64.0%	20.5%	58.4%
15 weeks	47.1%	65.2%	18.1%	60.5%

One reason for the differential response rates, in addition to the "resurvey" individuals not receiving Spring 1972 familiarization, is that the tracing information was much less complete. It consisted only of the addresses on file at the high school from which the student had graduated more than a year previously. Coupled with their probable lack of "involvement" in NLS, the known mobility of this age group was detrimental to the overall response rate.

Table 7 furnishes a breakdown of mail response rates of Base-Year participants to First Follow-Up by sex, race, region, urbanization of the schools' students, and income of the students' families as of their senior year in high school. Complete data were not available on all variables for all students, as these data were from Base-Year files. Most missing information (sex, race, etc.) was gathered in the First Follow-Up effort. As might be expected, the response rate was higher for females (71.0 percent) than males (60.3 percent) and for whites (70.9 percent than blacks (48.9 percent) or others (57.3 percent), but there was little difference in region except that the South was lower (60.8 percent) than the other areas (which averaged 66.8 percent). The degree of urbanization of the schools appeared to have little effect on response, with nine different categories ranging from a low of 61.4 percent to a high of 68.9 percent. There was a spread of some 19.6 percent in response rate as affected by income, with those students of the higher income families generally responding at a higher rate.

D. Special Studies

Knowing that NLS would continue beyond the First Follow-Up, RTI developed a plan to give NCES information that might lead to improvements in strategy for subsequent effort. Figure 2 is the design of the overall follow-up activity just discussed and indicates those special supplementary samples and activities imbedded therein. The plan does not purport to represent a rigorous design for comparison of experimental treatments. It was intended to give practical guidance for future work with NLS without disrupting the ongoing high response rate efforts.

Broadly speaking, this special study was designed to allow comparisons between (1) Air Mail and Certified Mail questionnaires, (2) telephone calls made prior to the receipt of the questionnaire by a sample member, and prompting calls made after receipt, and (3) mailgrams and prompting postcards.

Table 7

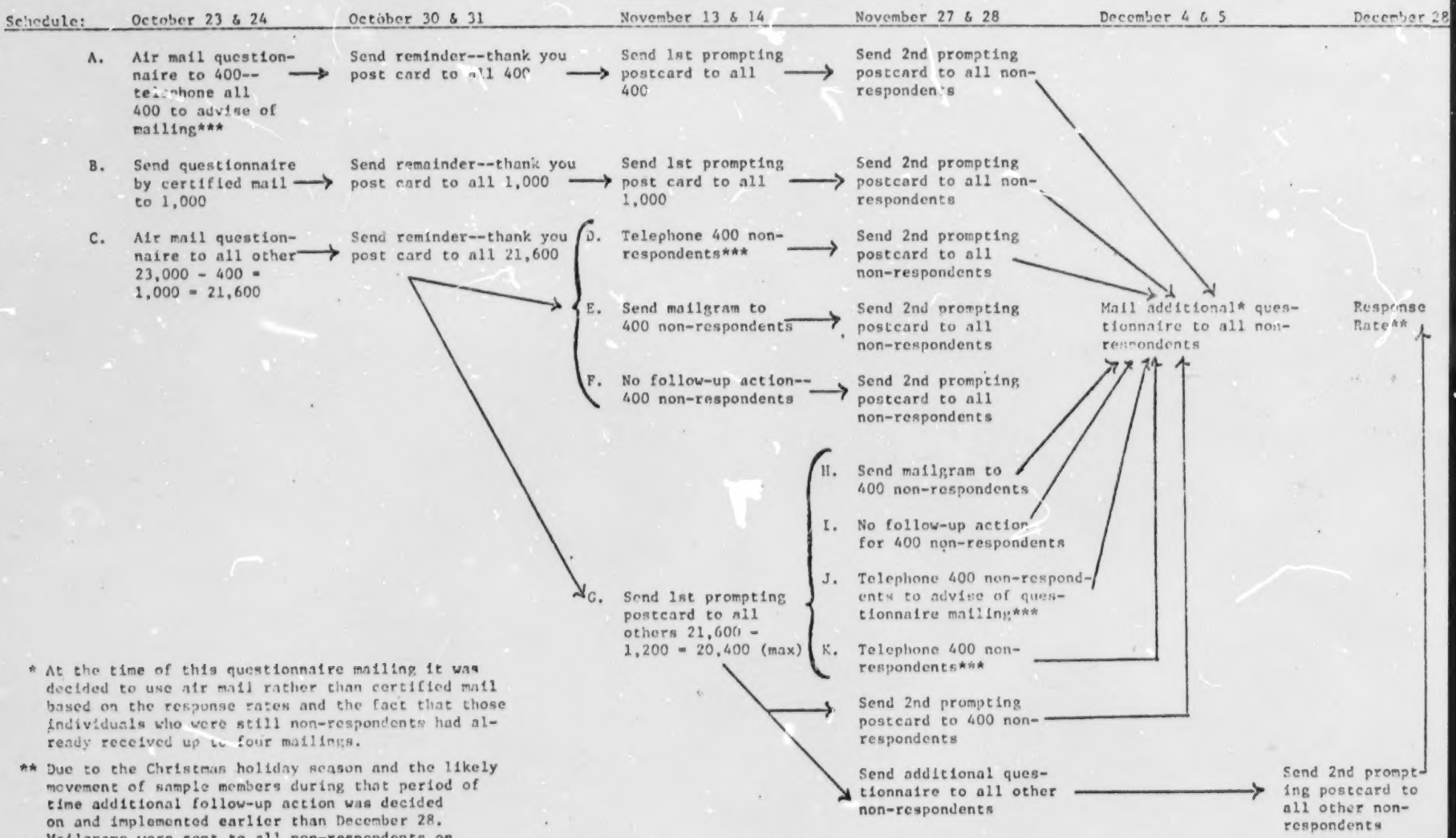
COMPARATIVE MAIL RESPONSE RATES BY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Variable	Number In Sample	Number Responding	Response Rate
Sex:			
Male	8,074	4,864	60.3%
Female	8,201	5,825	71.0%
Race:			
Black	2,023	989	48.9%
White	12,287	8,711	70.9%
Other	1,550	888	57.3%
Region:			
Northeast	3,742	2,522	67.4%
Central	4,857	3,234	66.6%
South	5,963	3,626	60.8%
West	3,157	2,093	66.3%
School Urbanization:			
#1--10 largest central city districts	1,915	1,225	64.0%
#2--Next 90 largest central districts	2,058	1,264	61.4%
#3--SMSA schools with 10 largest	1,599	1,102	68.9%
#4--SMSA schools with next 90 largest	2,834	1,897	66.9%
#5--All other SMSA schools	3,258	2,088	64.1%
#6--Outside SMSA, 75-100% urban	383	252	65.8%
#7--Outside SMSA, 50-74% urban	1,724	1,116	64.7%
#8--Outside SMSA, 25-49% urban	2,168	1,414	65.2%
#9--Outside SMSA, 0-24% urban	1,570	978	62.3%
Income:			
Less than $3,000	943	510	54.1%
$ 3,000 to $ 6,000	1,621	965	59.5%
$ 6,000 to $ 7,500	1,462	922	63.1%
$ 7,500 to $ 9,000	1,297	830	64.0%
$ 9,000 to $10,500	1,524	1,101	72.2%
$10,500 to $12,000	1,216	831	68.3%
$12,000 to $13,500	1,106	763	69.0%
$13,500 to $15,000	837	615	73.5%
$15,000 to $18,000	1,082	787	72.7%
$18,000 +	1,756	1,294	73.7%

Figure 2

SPECIAL STUDY PLAN

NLS MAILOUT AND FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES


Schedule:
October 23 & 24
October 30 & 31
November 13 & 14
November 27 & 28
December 4 & 5
December 28
A. Air mail questionnaire to 400--telephone all 400 to advise of mailing***
Send reminder--thank you post card to all 400
Send 1st prompting postcard to all 400
Send 2nd prompting postcard to all non-respondents
B. Send questionnaire by certified mail to 1,000
Send remainder--thank you post card to all 1,000
Send 1st prompting post card to all 1,000
Send 2nd prompting postcard to all non-respondents
C. Air mail questionnaire to all other 23,000 - 400 = 1,000 = 21,600
Send reminder--thank you post card to all 21,600
D. Telephone 400 non-respondents***
Send 2nd prompting postcard to all non-respondents
E. Send mailgram to 400 non-respondents
Send 2nd prompting postcard to all non-respondents
F. No follow-up action--400 non-respondents
Send 2nd prompting postcard to all non-respondents
Mail additional* questionnaire to all non-respondents
Response Rate**
G. Send 1st prompting postcard to all others 21,600 - 1,200 = 20,400 (max)
H. Send mailgram to 400 non-respondents
I. No follow-up action for 400 non-respondents
J. Telephone 400 non-respondents to advise of questionnaire mailing***
K. Telephone 400 non-respondents***
Send 2nd prompting postcard to 400 non-respondents
Send additional questionnaire to all other non-respondents
Send 2nd prompting postcard to all other non-respondents

* At the time of this questionnaire mailing it was decided to use air mail rather than certified mail based on the response rates and the fact that those individuals who were still non-respondents had already received up to four mailings.

** Due to the Christmas holiday season and the likely movement of sample members during that period of time additional follow-up action was decided on and implemented earlier than December 28. Mailgrams were sent to all non-respondents on December 12 and 13, 1973.

*** Each telephone contact was also used to verify the respondent's home address.

Table 8 indicates for each of the groups shown in Figure 2 the dates, type of action, and subgroup response rates as of 4 January 1974. It should be added that all of the 999 sample members who were sent Certified Mail questionnaires were Base-Year participants. Even correcting for "resurvey" members spread among the other two initial groups, a comparison of Air Mail response with Certified Mail response shows a clear edge to Certified Mail (about 10 percent).

Table 8

SUB-SAMPLE RESPONSE RATES AS OF JANUARY 4, 1974
(See Figure 2)

Date	Group	Sample Size	Number Contacted	Number Responding	Response Rate
10/23	A. Air Mail	21,621	20,762	13,170	63.4%
10/23	B. Certified Mail	999	913	690	75.6%
10/23	C. Telephone/Air Mail	404	318	273	85.8%
11/13	D. Telephone	400	365	251	68.8%
11/13	E. Mailgram	398	386	198	51.3%
11/13	F. No Follow-Up	400	400 (est.)	184	46.0%
11/27	H. Mailgram	400	394	153	38.8%
11/27	I. No Follow-Up	400	400 (est.)	116	29.0%
11/27	J. Telephone	399	330	183	55.5% (With Questionnaires)
11/27	K. Telephone	400	350	198	56.6% (With Questionnaires)

A review of Table 8 indicates that telephone contact has the highest impact on response rates; however, it is also by far the most expensive. Based on the practical problems involved in reaching a large number of non-respondents in a short time, plus cost considerations, it appeared that mailgrams were most cost-effective. Early in December 1973 it appeared that with approximately 50 percent mail response probable, the 60 percent goal might not be reached and the interview load to be borne by the Bureau of the Census would be heavier than anticipated. Provided with response rates (e.g., Table 8) for various procedures, costs, and scheduling requirements, NCES and RTI decided

on sending mailgrams to all nonrespondents. A prediction based on data at hand was made that the final response rate would be close to 60 percent with this procedure. The 10,313 mailgrams which were sent on December 13 and 14 had a more positive effect on nonrespondents that was anticipated, and the overall response rate came to over 60 percent. Admittedly, it is hard to know how many might have come in without this further effort, for example, from the college students with spare time during the holiday season or who returned home for vacation and found the questionnaire waiting there.

In addition to the special mailgram effort, it was decided to conduct a special telephone interview on a small subsample (N = 400) of nonrespondents for the purpose of determining some reasons for nonresponse by mail. The special telephone survey was conducted by the Tracing Department during the period 18-28 December 1973 with 298 Base-Year and 95 "resurvey" nonrespondents selected by random sampling. There were 220 (56 percent) sample members contacted (of which 169 were Base-Year) and 98 family or household members (83 Base-Year). While the reasons for nonresponse fell in dozens of categories, the 164 respondents to this question could be categorized as those who had little if any interest in the study and preferred to take the easy way out (rather than being discourteous) when dealing with probes about nonresponse. This includes the 19 who said they "never got the questionnaire," the 26 who "lost the questionnaire," the 49 who "haven't had time," and most of the 41 who have "other" reasons.

A secondary purpose of this telephone survey was to probe for actions to improve the response rate. Only 90 persons answered in this regard, and only one-third of these were positive in their outlook by giving affirmative answers to "receiving more information about the study" and "receiving a $5.00 incentive."

E. Census Bureau Field Interviews

Under the terms of a separate contract between the Office of Education and the Bureau of the Census, 8,549 mail nonrespondents' tracing information (appended to blank questionnaires) was turned over by RTI to Census Bureau workers early in January 1974. This had been preceded by preliminary listings in December of nonrespondents distributed by zip code and Census Bureau districts, so that the districts could plan workloads.

Although the overall purpose of this interview effort was to obtain personal interviews from all nonrespondents who could be located, due to the budget (and to the national fuel crisis emerging at that time) a mileage restriction of 50 miles had to be imposed, beyond which a telephone interview would suffice. This telephone interview format contained only a subset of 22 "key" questions,

i.e., those deemed most critical by analysts, because the entire questionnaire was judged as too long for effective telephone interview.

Fieldwork began in late January 1974; by the end of March all interviews (personal and telephone) had been completed for all available sample members. Of the 8,549 cases referred, 7,458 were interviewed, for a gross completion rate of 87.2 percent. Administration time for personal interview averaged 45 minutes; by telephone it was about 15. Just over 10 percent of the cases were completed by telephone.

Subsequent removals from the file due to death, confirmed ineligible sample members (e.g., some "resurvey" schools had inadvertantly given other, i.e., non-1972 seniors), and duplicates resulted in the total number of respondents to the First Follow-Up Survey being 21,350, 92.3 percent of the planned sample of 23,122, or 92.8 percent of the questionnaire mailout of 23,020.

III. DATA QUALITY

A. Substantive Logical Consistency Checks

There were multiple considerations which went into deciding whether a returned questionnaire was considered to have an adequate amount of information in it for acceptance and subsequent entry into the data file. The general approach was to insure a sufficient knowledge of respondent activities since leaving high school, rather than acquiring a mass of data on many specific items. There were also very real cost restraints on the depth to which the very complex questionnaires could be edited and made internally consistent. It also seemed important to edit the mail return questionnaires quite soon after receipt so that the respondent could be re-contacted by telephone or mail for clarification and correction.

Items selected for examination included up to 22 questions (depending upon appropriate skip patterns) covering:

-Current activities and plans
-Education and training since high school
-Civilian work experience since high school
-Military service
-Background (tracing) information.

A staff of editors was recruited and trained to perform these checks beginning in November 1973 as the first returns came in. If a questionnaire failed the

edit checks, its problems were noted on an Edit Problem Sheet, the sheet and the questionnaire were routed to the Tracing Department, and that staff (also trained as editors and interviewers) telephoned the respondents. "Key" questions only were clarified or corrected with the respondent--no other information was checked or requested. The goal was not only to obtain answers to appropriate "key" questions but also to insure that responses to those questions were consistent among themselves.

Tables 9 and 10 show the results of this pre-machine manual edit effort for mail and Census Bureau completions. A total of 28.6 percent (4,022) of mail questionnaires failed to meet minimum requirements and were turned over to the Telephone Tracing Department for telephone follow-up. Of these, 3,822 or 95.1 percent were completed successfully.

Table 9

TELEPHONE COMPLETION OF MAIL RETURN QUESTIONNAIRES
THAT FAILED EDIT SPECIFICATIONS
(Through 29 April 1974)

	Form A		Form B		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Number of questionnaires for which all key items completed	2,828	94.8	947	91.1	3,775	93.9
Number of questionnaires for which partial information completed (one or more key items not obtained)	22	0.7	25	2.4	47	1.2
Number of refusals	8	0.3	4	0.4	12	0.3
Number of respondents in military service (overseas)	25	0.8	9	0.9	34	0.9
Number of respondents with no phone	53	1.8	26	2.5	79	2.0
Number of respondents with unpublished number	8	0.3	3	0.3	11	0.3
Other	38	1.3	26	2.5	64	1.6
Total	2,982	100.0	1,040	100.0	4,022	100.0

Table 10

TELEPHONE COMPLETION OF CENSUS QUESTIONNAIRES
THAT FAILED EDIT SPECIFICATIONS
(Through 29 April 1974)

	Form A		Form B		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Number of questionnaires for which all key items completed	24	96.0	7	77.8	31	91.2
Number of questionnaires for which partial information completed (one or more key items not obtained)	0	0.0	1	11.1	1	2.9
Number of refusals	1	4.0	1	0.0	1	2.9
Number of respondents with no phone	0	0.0	1	11.1	1	2.9
Total	25	100.0	9	100.0	34	100.0

B. Machine Edits

It is beyond the scope of this paper dealing with survey procedures to delve deeply into the wide range of machine checks (range, validity, skip pattern, etc.) which were made on the complete data file. These are covered in the Users Manual which will accompany the data tapes for a potential user of the NLS data pool.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SECOND FOLLOW-UP

A. Mailout Process

Based on experience in the First Follow-Up, several additional steps were recommended for subsequent follow-ups to promote among sample members greater awareness and expectation prior to questionnaire receipt, and therefore a potentially higher response rate in initial phases of mail data collections.

Specifically, it was recommended that an advisory letter be sent to parents of each sample member whose First Follow-Up address is the same as his parents. This letter to parents would explain that a package of survey materials for their son or daughter (who was a senior in high school in 1972) will arrive within a few weeks and that these materials should be forwarded to the son or daughter if away from home at the time, rather than being held until return from college, or leave, etc. If the parents do not wish to forward the materials, they would be asked to call RTI collect so that an immediate second mailing can be made directly to another address.

Approximately one week prior to the questionnaire mailout, an advisory letter should be mailed to all sample members. This would be a brief letter to explain that they should be receiving survey materials by Certified Mail within about ten days. This letter would be mailed to the address at which each sample member is most likely to receive mail during October 1974.

The initial mailing of questionnaires should be by Certified Mail. Not only did the First Follow-Up sub-sample receiving this type of mail respond at a higher rate, but this type seems to imply a sense of "importance" associated with the study while the cost is minimal.

More extensive use should be made of the mailgram, because it seemed to be a very cost-effective method to increase response rate. Because of an incomplete experimental design and the "last-ditch" effort in this regard during the First Follow-Up survey, it was suggested that one half of the nonrespondents to the first questionnaire mailout in the Second Follow-Up receive mailgrams with the balance receiving prompting postcards, and that this procedure be reversed for the nonrespondents to the second questionnaire mailout, i.e., those that received a Mailgram after the first questionnaire would receive a postcard and vice versa. In this way, a more exact estimate of mailgram effect can be made.

B. Tracing

The NLS First Follow-Up started with addresses for sample members which were fairly "old" in that at least 15 months had elapsed between Base-Year data collection and the initial newsletter. The Second Follow-Up, scheduled for October 1974-March 1975, will fare better in this regard, but any additionally useful tracing aid should be considered. For example, even though the use of the credit bureau system was not found to be helpful in First Follow-Up, it may be that as study members mature and establish their own households the credit bureau can be a useful source of tracing information at minimal cost.

C. Other Materials

The newsletter should begin to contain more results-oriented data for the sample group in order to elicit more interest in the growth and activities of the class or age group. The adoption of a newspaper format, and inclusion of personal interest stories about sample members, staff, and processes, should be helpful.

The computer-printed Identification Card seemed like a good idea, in that several hundred have been returned for address update in the past year. However, the respondent's name and address was easily smudged and became illegible; a new, non-carbon format should be adopted.

APPENDIX

Newsletter
Postcards
Mailgrams
Prompting Letter
Thank You Letter
Identification Card

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972

Volume 1, Number 1
July, 1973

National Center for Educational Statistics
Washington, D. C. 20202

What's Happening to the Class of '72?

Did you know that in the spring of last year, a representative nationwide sample of the High School Class of 1972 told the U.S. Office of Education that:

- 26% planned to begin working full-time upon completion of their senior year in high school?
- 58% planned to continue their education in college or vocational training schools?
- 44% reported that their parents had a great deal of influence on their plans for after high school, while 25% reported that friends their own age also had a great deal of influence on their plans?

Would you like to know more? We'll be glad to tell you everything you've always wanted to know about the class of '72 if you'll tell us WHERE YOU ARE and WHAT YOU'RE DOING. Fill out the enclosed postcard to let us know WHERE YOU ARE so that we can mail you a questionnaire this fall to find out WHAT YOU'RE DOING.

Read on to find out what OPERATION FOLLOW-UP is all about!

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

During 1972 over three and one-half million students were enrolled as seniors in high schools in the United States. You, however, are a *special* member of the class of 1972—you are part of a nationwide survey of educational and occupational experiences of a sample of more than 20,000 members of the 1972 high school class.

This important study, which is sponsored by the United States Office of Education, is an attempt to find out what happens to seniors after they leave high school. The fact that you are working, married, in college, in military service, or training for a job is important in relation to your educational background, your goals while you were in high school, and your goals and accomplishments now and in the future.

WHY ME?

You may remember some tests you took and a questionnaire you filled out during your senior year. These materials were part of the *National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972.* Because you participated in this study at that time, you are now invited to take part in OPERATION FOLLOW-UP.

KEEP US POSTED During this period of your life you are probably "on the go" as much as you will ever be. So that we can be sure to reach you in our fall mailing, please take a moment and fill out the enclosed postcard and return it to us as soon as possible. Thank you.

Your school was one of 1,200 schools chosen to represent all secondary schools across the United States. Eighteen members of your senior class, including you, were chosen at random to represent all the students in your senior class. The information you supplied at that time has been analyzed and educational researchers have compiled a profile of the attitudes, educational plans, career and personal goals, and other characteristics of the class of '72.

While your experiences and activities during the past year are unique to you, the types of things you have been doing are representative of similar experiences and activities shared by your fellow classmates across the nation. You and the other members of OPERATION FOLLOW-UP, therefore, are the voice of *all* students in the class of '72.

OK, SO WHAT NOW?

The information you supplied in 1972 is significant because it forms the foundation for a continuing study of the class of '72. In the fall of this year, you will be sent a "follow-up" questionnaire. This questionnaire will be similar to one you filled out during your senior year. You will be asked about what you are doing now and what you plan to do within the next year. You will also be asked to evaluate many aspects of your high school education and how well it has served you thus far.

Your answers to these questions will allow researchers to compare your high school plans and attitudes with your present activities, attitudes, and plans. Information of this type is valuable to planners and policy makers in improving the educational system by making it more responsive to students and their needs.

All of the information we obtain is treated in strictest confidence. Your name will never be published, released to anyone other than researchers working on the study, or associated in any way with the information you provide us. Your responses will be analyzed and used in statistical summaries to provide information much like that shown on page one of this newsletter.

WHY SHOULD I DO THIS?

Your participation in the National Longitudinal Study is strictly voluntary, but we expect your continued participation. We are interested in *you* and what you are doing. Even if every other selected member of the class of '72 participates in the study, without your completed questionnaire we will still be missing some valuable information which only you can provide.

This is your chance to tell us what's good–and what's not so good–about the education you received, the preparation you received for work or college, and the things that have happened to you since you left high school. This type of information can help improve schools and school programs–perhaps for your brothers and sisters or, someday, for your own children.

WHO'S DOING THIS STUDY?

This study, sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, is being conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and the Research Triangle Institute (RTI). RTI is a non-profit contract research organization located in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park.

WANT MORE INFORMATION?

We will be sending you several newsletters like this during the coming years to let you know what's going on and what we're learning about the class of '72. Be sure to give us your correct address so that we won't miss you. If you have any questions about your participation in the National Longitudinal Study, please write us at the address given below:

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP
Research Triangle Institute
Box 12194
Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27709

Newsletter

My name and address are:

☐ Both OK as printed

☐ Correct my name to: _____

☐ Correct my address to: _____

_____

My address on October 1, 1973 will be: (☐ Check here if same as indicated above.)

_____

_____

First Prompting

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972

A Survey Sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education

Have you forgotten something?

We haven't received your OPERATION FOLLOW-UP questionnaire yet. Have you filled it out and mailed it back? *Please* sit down, fill out your questionnaire, and tell us what's happening—we want to hear from *you*.

If you have lost or misplaced your questionnaire, please put this card in an envelope and mail it to:

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP
Research Triangle Institute
Box 12194
Research Triangle Park, N.C. 27709

We'll send you another questionnaire!

Thank You/Reminder

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972

A Survey Sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education

Just a reminder . . .

Last week we mailed you an OPERATION FOLLOW-UP questionnaire.

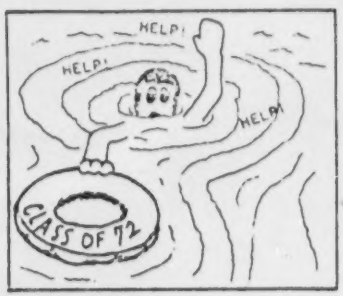
If you *have* completed and returned your questionnaire, thank you—many of your classmates also have.

If you *have not* returned your questionnaire, please sit down, fill out your questionnaire, and mail it back to us *today*. Only you can tell us what's happening to the Class of '72. Don't miss your chance!

Second Prompting

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972

A Survey Sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education



We know you have heard from us several times and we really don't want to bug you – BUT – we really do need your help. Please fill out your OPERATION FOLLOW-UP Questionnaire and mail it today. Your cooperation is vital to the success of this study and your participation will help to improve our educational system.

Don't let our study drown – throw us a life preserver!

1-046124A331016 11/27/73
TLX WU FMTS RAL
16 RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK
ZIP 27511

western union Mailgram

UNIT U.S.MAIL SERVICE

MR. DON A KING
1005 DANGLEWOOD DRIVE
CARY, N.C. 27511

AS A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972 YOU ARE VERY IMPORTANT TO US. IN LATE OCTOBER WE SENT YOU AN OPERATION FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE AND IT HAS NOT YET BEEN RETURNED. YOUR COOPERATION AND PARTICIPATION IS VITAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS STUDY, PLEASE SIT DOWN TODAY, FILL OUT YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE AND MAIL IT BACK TO US.

IF YOU HAVE LOST YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE CALL US COLLECT AT (919) 549-8311 AND IDENTIFY YOURSELF AS AN OPERATION FOLLOW-UP RESPONDENT. WE WILL THEN SEND YOU ANOTHER QUESTIONNAIRE.

PLEASE HURRY. WE ARE WAITING TO HEAR FROM YOU.

JAY DAVIS
PROJECT DIRECTOR

1754 EST

MGMGBOB GBO

MGMGBOT HSA
1-022742A341106 12/07/73
TLX WU FMTS RAL
101 RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK NC
ZIP 27511

western union Mailgram

UNITED S SERVICE U.S.MAIL

MR D A KING
1005 DANGLEWOOD DRIVE
CARY NC 27511

YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972 IS VERY IMPORTANT AND YOUR COOPERATION IS VITAL TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS STUDY. BUT WE HAVE NOT YET RECEIVED YOUR COMPLETED OPERATION FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE. PLEASE FILL OUT YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE TODAY AND MAIL IT BACK TO US.

IF YOU HAVE LOST YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE CALL US COLLECT AT (919) 549-8311 AND IDENTIFY YOURSELF AS AN OPERATION FOLLOW-UP PARTICIPANT. WE WILL SEND YOU ANOTHER QUESTIONNAIRE.

PLEASE HURRY. WE ARE WAITING TO HEAR FROM YOU.

J. A. DAVIS
PROJECT DIRECTOR

13:53 EST

MGMGBOT HSA

1-12036034801S 12/14/73
ICS MGMNCSA OPEN
01772 MLTN VA
ZIP 27511

western union mailgram

DONALD A. KING 805606
1005 TANGLEWOOD DR
CARY, NC 27511

YOU ARE IMPORTANT TO US!
SO ARE YOUR ACTIVITIES AND EXPERIENCES SINCE LEAVING HIGH SCHOOL. THAT IS WHAT THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF THE HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972 IS ALL ABOUT.
FILL OUT YOUR OPERATION FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE TODAY. YOUR COOPERATION IS VITAL AND YOUR ANSWERS WILL BE TREATED CONFIDENTIALLY.
IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE STUDY, OR HAVE LOST YOUR QUESTIONNAIRE, WE WILL HELP YOU. CALL US COLLECT AT (919) 549-8311, AND IDENTIFY YOURSELF AS AN OPERATION FOLLOW-UP PARTICIPANT.
PLEASE HURRY.

J. A. DAVIS
PROJECT DIRECTOR

01:46 EST

MGMGBOT MSA

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

Dear Member of the High School Class of 1972:

About three weeks ago you should have received a large air mail envelope containing an OPERATION FOLLOW-UP Questionnaire Booklet. This questionnaire is for you to use in telling us about your achievements and experiences since leaving high school.

As of today, your completed questionnaire has not been received. Just in case you never got it or have misplaced it, I am sending you another.

Please take a little time now to fill out the questionnaire. As best you can, simply answer each question which fits you. Omit any items that don't apply to you. When you have answered as many of the items as you can, put your completed booklet in the pre-paid envelope we have provided, and drop it in the mail. No stamp is necessary--any mailbox will do.

I deeply appreciate your help. Your answers are important in helping us learn how to improve the educational and vocational opportunities for the young people of today and tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Dorothy M. Gilford

Dorothy M. Gilford
Assistant Commissioner for
Educational Statistics

DMG:fh

Enclosure

RESEARCH TRIANGLE INSTITUTE
POST OFFICE BOX 12194
RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, NORTH CAROLINA 27709

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Dear OPERATION FOLLOW-UP Participant:

Thank you for completing the First Follow-Up Questionnaire of the *National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972*. Each person in the sample for this survey represents thousands of others, and so your cooperation is very important. You contributed valuable information toward understanding what is happening to the Class of '72.

We expect to send you a Class of 1972 Identification Card attached to a handy change-of-address postcard. You can use the postcard to notify us if you move. Later a Newsletter containing some of the preliminary results of this phase of the project will be coming to you. Look for these in your mail.

Remember--we are grateful for your past help and look forward to your continued cooperation.

Thanks again for your interest and participation in OPERATION FOLLOW-UP.

Sincerely,

J. A. Davis
Project Director

JAD:fh

(919) 549-8311 FROM RALEIGH, DURHAM AND CHAPEL HILL

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP
Research Triangle Institute
Box 12194
Research Triangle Park
North Carolina 27709

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

TO OPEN TEAR ALONG THIS PERFORATION
↓ USE THUMB NOTCH TO REMOVE CONTENTS ↓

This is your membership card for the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education.

We want and need your continued interest and participation in OPERATION FOLLOW-UP. The address on the Membership Card is the current mailing address we have for you.

If this address is not correct, or when you move or get married, write your new name and/or address in the space provided, and drop the card in the mail to us.

We will send you a new OPERATION FOLLOW-UP Membership Card.

Here is your OPERATION FOLLOW-UP Membership Card. Detach it and keep it with you. It identifies you as a special member of the High School Class of 1972.

You have been assigned a six-digit identification number (to the right of your name) which allows us to protect the confidentiality of your answers to OPERATION FOLLOW-UP questionnaires. Check your ID number against any further newsletters and questionnaires you receive. If you need to contact us in regard to OPERATION FOLLOW-UP, be sure to use your ID number when you call or write.

Your answers to OPERATION FOLLOW-UP questionnaires are a valuable contribution to the review of the process of educating young people in the United States. Thank you for your willingness to participate in OPERATION FOLLOW-UP.

A project of the
UNITED STATES OFFICE OF EDUCATION

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP
Research Triangle Institute
Box 12194
Research Triangle Park
North Carolina 27709

FIRST CLASS
Permit No. 593
Research Triangle Park,
North Carolina

☐ Correct my name to:

☐ Correct my address to:

FOLD ALONG DOTTED LINE

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY
OF THE
HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972

DETACH HERE

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP MEMBERSHIP CARD

TO OPEN TEAR ALONG THIS PERFORATION
USE THUMB NOTCH TO REMOVE CONTENTS

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

This is your membership card for the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972, sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education.

We want and need your continued interest and participation in OPERATION FOLLOW-UP. The address on the Membership Card is the current mailing address we have for you.

If this address is not correct, or when you move or get married, write your new name and/or address in the space provided, and drop the card in the mail to us.

We will send you a new OPERATION FOLLOW-UP Membership Card.

Here is your OPERATION FOLLOW-UP Membership Card. Detach it and keep it with you—it identifies you as a special member of the High School Class of 1972.

You have been assigned a secret identification number (to the right of your name) which allows us to protect the confidentiality of your answers to OPERATION FOLLOW-UP questionnaires. Check your ID number against any further newsletters and questionnaires you receive. If you need to contact us in regard to OPERATION FOLLOW-UP, be sure to use your ID number when you call or write.

Your answers to OPERATION FOLLOW-UP questionnaires are a valuable contribution to the review of the process of educating young people in the United States. Thank you for your willingness to participate in OPERATION FOLLOW-UP.

UNITED STATES OFFICE OF EDUCATION

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP
Research Triangle Institute
Box 12194
Research Triangle Park
North Carolina 27709

FIRST CLASS
Permit No. 503
Research Triangle Park, North Carolina

☐ Correct my name to:

☐ Correct my address to:

FOLD ALONG DOTTED LINE

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL STUDY
OF THE
HIGH SCHOOL CLASS OF 1972

OPERATION FOLLOW-UP MEMBERSHIP CARD